

BREAD FROM HEAVEN

by Ray C. Stedman and David H. Roper

- [The Bread from Heaven \(RCS\), \(John 6\) \(DP #3297\)](#)
- [The King of Peace \(DHR\), \(Genesis 14:17-24\) \(DP #3298\)](#)
- [At Judas' Feet \(DHR\), \(John 13:1-20\) \(DP #3299\)](#)
- [The Servant of the Lord \(DHR\), \(Isaiah 42:1-4\) \(DP #3300\)](#)

THE BREAD FROM HEAVEN

by Ray C. Stedman

John 6 follows the miracles of Jesus' feeding of the 5,000 and walking on the water. A crowd has followed Jesus to the other side of the lake and now he discourses on the bread of life:

"Do not work for the food that spoils [or perishes], but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. On him God the Father has placed his seal of approval." (John 6:27 NIV)

That almost sounds as though the Lord is saying "Don't bother to go to work. Don't bother to earn any money for food, it's not worth it." But, of course, he is not saying that, because in many other places he indicates that God has given us the ability to work and labor, and this is the way he supplies our needs. He knows we need food and shelter and clothing and other things -- the *Sermon on the Mount* reflects that. But here our Lord is saying "Don't just work for food. Realize that while you are working for food, God can be at work with you. That is the work that changes the world. It changes you, and it changes the world. Your very labor to earn food also can be the time when God is working. Let that be your goal, not earning money to buy food."

Look at the response in verse 28:

Then they asked him, "What must we do to do the work of God?" (John 6:28 NIV)

Surely that is a hunger that lies at the bottom of every heart. "What can we do to do the works of God?" Everybody wants power. We want to be able to relate to God and to do what he wants done in this world. We sense that this is fulfillment, this is power, this is effectiveness, this is the meaning of life. So these people, sensing this, said to him, "What must we do to do the works of God?" Jesus' reply is very significant.

He said, "The work of God is this: to believe in the one whom he has sent." (John 6:29 NIV)

The word "believe" does not refer to a single act. It doesn't mean to believe once, and become a Christian; it is in the continuous present tense, so it means "to keep on believing in the one that he sent." For that one is able to work through you. What Jesus is really saying here is that no man can do God's work. Only God can do God's work. If you want God's work done, it takes God to do it. The joy of the Christian life is that, through your faith in Christ, he provides God to do his work while you are working -- whether you are working at your house, or shop, or school, or office.

What is the work of God? If you asked that question today, many people would say, "Well, it is to do miracles. God is a miracle-working God." This viewpoint is stressed today. God works miracles. Jesus worked miracles. He healed the sick, he raised the dead, he opened the eyes of the blind; that is the work of God. Well, that was the work of God -- there is no question about it. But that is not what our Lord is referring to here, because, as he makes clear, this is not something that men can do. The work of God is not to go around doing startling miracles for people to see. That is what people today think miracles are. But miracles are something that other power can effect within us, too. Scripture warns that the devil and his angels are able to do miracles. So miracles alone never constitute a sign of God at work.

Then what is the work of God? The work of God is to change people. That is what God is here for. That is what he sent the Lord for -- to change people. God's work is to take an impatient aggressive businessman who is out only to make money for his own purposes and to advance his own style of living, and change him into a compassionate, patient man who learns how to think of others and to work for their good as well as his own. Now that takes power. The work of God is to take a shrewish, mean-tempered woman who yells at her kids and screams at her husband, and turn her into a patient, loving wife who learns how to handle her husband and family in love. That is the work of God.

Do you know that the nations of this earth have been laboring for centuries to find a power that can do those simple things? No power has been found that can do these things. All our vast, expensive educational systems cannot do them. We have ample testimony to that, haven't we? But God, at work in a human being, can change him, make him new and fresh and different, and help him to act in ways that ordinarily he would not act. That is the work of God.

In Verse 30, these people asked another question:

So they asked him, "What miraculous sign then will you give that we may see it and believe you? What will you do?" (John 6:30 RSV)

"You tell us you are going to do this; all right, then give us a sign. We want a miracle." They had just had a miracle. It is amazing to me that they would ask for a sign just after the feeding of the five thousand, but the desire for miracles is insatiable. The people asked for a sign, and they gave the Lord a little hint of what kind of sign they would like.

"Our forefathers ate manna in the desert..." (John 6:31a NIV)

"Aha! You claim you are greater than Moses, but Moses fed us in the wilderness. What sign do you give?" This is almost incredible. After Jesus had fed the five thousand, this is what they asked for. Jesus replied, "Well, you are wrong. You are wrong in two ways. First, it wasn't Moses who gave you the manna in the wilderness, it was God. Moses was just a man. He was an instrument of God, but it was God who gave you the manna in the wilderness, not Moses."

"Second, you are wrong in that you think what you need is manna. That is not what you need. What you need is me. You need my life in you. And if you understood that, then you would realize that your efforts to earn a living can be the platform from which you are available as an instrument to do the work of God."

God's work is not something you just do here at church; it is something you do throughout the week. That is when God is interested in you doing the work of God. To do God's work you must learn this great fact that Jesus states very clearly in Verse 53:

Jesus said to them, "I tell you the truth, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you." (John 6:53 NIV)

That sounds like he is turning us all into cannibals, doesn't it? Eat flesh, drink blood. But that is why we have a communion service. We do not do this because, as some people think, the bread and wine are turned into the flesh and blood of Jesus. They are not turned into anything. They remain bread and grape juice, or wine. But they are symbols of the fact Jesus states here. If you do not eat his flesh and drink his blood -- all week long -- you have no life in you. God is not at work in you.

How do you eat his flesh and drink his blood? In Verse 35, he explains what he means by "eat" and "drink":

Then Jesus declared, "I am the bread of life; he who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty." (John 6:35 NIV)

When are you not hungry? When you have eaten, right? That is really the only time when you are not hungry. Most people are a little bit hungry about an hour after they have eaten and start raiding the refrigerator. So hunger returns pretty fast. But when you have just gotten up from a full meal, you are no longer hungry. Jesus says, "He who comes to me will no longer be hungry," therefore, he who has come to Jesus has eaten. And "he who believes in me will never be thirsty." When are you not thirsty? When you have just drunk. Therefore, he says, "He who believes in me has already drunk of me." This is what "eat" and "drink" mean -- come and believe. This is what the symbol of eating and drinking means: Come to me, think about me, realize that I am with you and I am able to work in you and through you and change your attitude right where you are. Then believe on me, change it, do it, and I'll be there to make it work."

This is the most radical principle ever released among men! This is what Christianity is all about. It will change your life. Start living that way -- not just here at church, but all through the week, at home, wherever you are. You will be a different person as you learn this principle. Come and believe, come and believe -- all week long.

Confronted with any demand, instead of reacting according to the way you feel, act according to the way he says, and show love, patience, forgiveness, understanding, and tenderness -- whatever the need may be -- on the basis that he is ready to work through you and make it work. See how Jesus puts that in Verse 57:

"Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father [Jesus was eating and drinking the Father all the time], **so the one who feeds on me will live because of me."** (John 6:57 NIV)

You and I, eating and drinking him, coming and believing in him all the time, will live because of him.

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THE KING OF PEACE

by David H. Roper

Chapter 14 is one of the first places in the book of Genesis that touches a point of history. This passage is cast against great battles and empires of great names. The men whose names are mentioned in Chapter 14, Verse 1, are men who are well-known from the monuments of this period.

And yet, as you read this chapter, you get the impression that these are only the incidentals of the story. God's preoccupation is with Abram and Abram's walk with Him. God's real concern is for the heart of his man. Though Abram was a nobody, God called him out of very obscure origins to be somebody. He is, as Paul described himself, unknown -- and yet, he is well-known, because in God's eyes he is an important figure. He is a strategic figure who had a great impact upon his time and continues to this day to have that sort of an impact. Though from a secular standpoint there are some great names from this time, the greatest name of all is that of Abram, and the work that God was doing in his life.

In Genesis 14, Abram was returning from the slaughter of four kings from Mesopotamia. Their names are given to us in Verse 1: Amraphel king of Shinar, Arioch king of Ellasar, Chedorlaomer king of Elam, and Tidal king of Goiim. Their names don't mean much to us, but they were well-known at that time. These men had carried out a punitive raid on the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah and the cities to the south of the Dead Sea.

After years of paying tribute to these Mesopotamian kings, five kings who lived around the region of Sodom rebelled against these Mesopotamian kings. Chedorlaomer led his forces out, looted the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, burned them, and took captives back with him to Mesopotamia.

We are told in Verse 10:

Now the valley of Siddim was full of tar pits; and the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah fled, and they fell into them [they leaped into them to hide]. **But those who survived fled to the hill country.** (Genesis 14:10 NASB)

These men wreaked total havoc in these towns, taking the citizens of Sodom and Gomorrah and their sister cities captive. Lot, who was the nephew of Abram, was one of those taken captive -- and that brings Abram into the story, because he goes to rescue his nephew.

Throughout the rest of this account we are told how Abram chased these kings to Dan and engaged them in conflict there. Then he chased them north of Damascus, and finally he drove them out of the country, and was able to save Lot and his family and the other Sodomites and their goods and bring them back with him.

As you read this chapter, it is difficult to see the magnitude of this action. Abram had a very small force -- less than 400

men -- and he had taken on four of the greatest powers of that age.

It was somewhat like the recent Israeli strike in Uganda. In the aftermath of this strike, you wonder what this action ultimately will cost, and whether Uganda will retaliate.

Abram is making his way back to Hebron with the captives, traveling along one of the trade routes that run along the crest of the Judean highlands. As he is traveling, he encounters two men: this king Melchizedek, who is the king of Salem, and the king of Sodom. We read of the events that transpire because of their meeting.

If this is your first time to read Genesis 14, you must wonder who Melchizedek is, because he has no historical antecedence. We don't know where he comes from -- there is no genealogy given, he is not tied in with anyone we know about. He just appears, and he disappears. He is never heard of again in history. His name occurs twice more in the Scriptures, in Hebrews 7 and Psalm 110; but, historically, we know nothing about Melchizedek. Who is he? Where does he come from? What is the significance of this brief meeting with Abram?

We can pick up a number of facts about Melchizedek from this passage. First, we learn that he is a king. Abram met this king in the King's Valley, the Kidron, just to the east of Jerusalem. In the book of Second Samuel this is identified as the King's Valley.

We also know that Melchizedek was the king of Jerusalem, because Salem was the ancient name of Jerusalem. Long before the Israelites captured it, Jerusalem was known as the city of peace -- Shalem, or Urusalim, as it was known in many of the inscriptions of this period. In this translation, Salem is merely the shortened form for the name of the city.

So Melchizedek was one of the Canaanite kings of the city of Jerusalem, and he met Abram as Abram was returning from this conflict. Melchizedek gave Abram bread and wine to fortify him. Abram had been involved in a very difficult battle, he had traveled long and hard, and his men were tired and hungry. Melchizedek met their need at a crucial time.

The account also tells us that Melchizedek was a king/priest, which was unusual. Any Jew reading this account at a later time in history would immediately fix his attention on the two offices that Melchizedek held, because nowhere in Israel do you have any example of these two offices being combined. Kings and priests were separate. These offices were divided because the kings might be tempted to use their spiritual or religious power to gain political power over the people. But here is a man who is both king and priest -- a man who represents God to the people and the people of God, and who also exercises political authority. So he is somewhat unique.

We are also told that Melchizedek worshipped God Most High. This was a term which the Canaanites used for the highest god. But in this case, we have a Canaanite who worships one God -- he is a monotheist. He worships the same God that Abram worships, the God who is the possessor of heaven and earth. It all belongs to him. He not only created it, but he also possesses it.

So Melchizedek appears as a priest/king from the city of Jerusalem, and he gives Abram and his retainers bread and wine. He blesses Abram and calls his attention to the fact that it was God Most High who delivered him. The one who is the possessor of heaven and earth is the one who has consistently met Abram's needs.

Who is this Melchizedek? His name describes him as the king of righteousness. His name is composed of two words, *malki* (king) and *sedeq* (righteousness). He is the king of righteousness. In Old Testament terms, the word "righteousness" means conformity to a standard, and the standard is Godlikeness. Men who were like God were righteous men.

Suppose that you purchased some property and were uncertain whether the man who sold you the property had measured it accurately. In fact, you suspected that he had used an 11-inch ruler. How would you check it out? You could use some of the 12-inch rulers that you knew about, but he might not be willing to take your word for it. So you could go back to Washington, D. C., to the Bureau of Weights and Measures, and you would find there a platinum bar marked out in inches and feet, and you could check his ruler against that 12-inch standard, and you could establish whether his was a righteous measure or not. That is what the term "righteous" means in the Old Testament sense. It is conformity to a standard, and the standard is the character of God. Everything must be measured in those terms.

Later, in Hebrews Melchizedek is called the king of peace, the one who has authority to grant peace. Now *peace*, in Old Testament terms, means "wholeness, completeness."

In Deuteronomy 25, when Moses describes the need for just weights and measures, he says, "Whatever weight you have, be sure that it is righteous and peaceful." That is, be sure your weight is according to the standard, not lighter than the accepted standard. Merchants had an unscrupulous habit of filing the corners off their weights, and thus they would cheat the people by using these measurements. God says to make your weight whole and entire, and according to the standard. So the king of Salem was a man who was complete and had authority over wholeness, the authority to grant adequacy, and he was the king of righteousness, with authority over righteousness.

Let's try to imagine what Abram was thinking as he was returning from the slaughter of these kings. I am sure he was a little uneasy. He might have been somewhat exhilarated, as we are after some great victory.

If you have been watching the Olympics this past week, you have seen that look on the faces of young men and women who are Olympic champions. There is a tremendous sense of exhilaration that comes from having won.

But we know from the context that Abram was also feeling something else -- fear. In Chapter 15, Verse 1, the Lord spoke to Abram in a vision at night, and said, "Stop fearing, Abram." That is the way that should be read, for that is the force of those words. Abram was afraid. He had enraged four of the mightiest men of his time, and he was afraid they would retaliate. He had ventured himself in a precipitous act of faith. and now he was second-guessing himself.

Have you ever done that? Have you thought that God had called you to do a certain thing, and so you did it, believing that God would undergird you. Then when you got out there you began to wonder, "What in the world am I doing? Did I really do that? Is God going to support me in this project?"

We have had in our home this past week a young couple who will be studying here next year. They are leaving very secure jobs and a home, and they have children who are in school. They gave all this up because they feel that God is calling them to study in the scribe program here next year.

Then they arrived here with no jobs -- and you know how expensive housing is. There are all sorts of superficial indications that they made the wrong decision. Although they have been strong in faith, there have been many temptations to second-guess, and to wonder if this is truly the direction the Lord wants them to go. Who of us can't identify with that? We have all been there. And that is what Abram felt.

This man Melchizedek comes at the time of Abram's greatest need, and he ministers grace to him. Melchizedek does two things: First, he gives Abram bread and wine -- he ministers to his physical need. I believe this initial action is symbolic for the second action that Melchizedek takes, which is to bless Abram. Now, the word "bless" means to bestow upon another all that that person needs for life. It is the bestowal of those things that make one adequate to live, those things that give us the capacity to cope. So Melchizedek blesses Abram -- he gives him the resources for facing the demands that he has to face. Essentially, in blessing Abram he reminds him that it is God Most High who is the possessor of heaven and earth.

Reading between the lines, I can see what was going on in Abram's mind as he made his way south by Jerusalem. He probably had his hand calculator out and was trying to determine how he was going to pay the bills for this operation. He had wasted a great deal of time on this expedition, and probably had lost some of his own goods. But he was thinking how he could retain some of the goods from Sodom for himself. All of this was going through his mind, and he was very uneasy about the provision for his own needs. Melchizedek meets him and reminds him of the source of his adequacy -- God Most High.

You see, the greatest attack Abram was going to face was not from the kings of Mesopotamia. They were no threat. They are never heard of again in the scriptural account. The greatest attack upon Abram came from the king of Sodom.

The king of Sodom suggested that Abram keep the goods for himself. "That's the way to provide for your needs. Keep the booty that the Mesopotamians took from us and give me the souls," he said. "Give me the people and you keep the goods."

Abram was sorely tempted to count on those material possessions. But Melchizedek tells Abram: "No, your confidence is in God Most High." So when the attack of the king of Sodom comes, Abram's response, in almost the same words as Melchizedek's, is this (Verse 22):

And Abram said to the king of Sodom, "I have sworn to the Lord God Most High, possessor of heaven and earth,"
(Genesis 14:22 NASB)

It is *Yahweh*, it is the Lord, who is the Most High God, who owns it all. The king of Sodom may have a few possessions, but as we know from reading further in Genesis, all of those possessions were dedicated to destruction. It wasn't long before all of them were destroyed. The king of Sodom has only those possessions, but the God Most High owns it all. He is the possessor of the universe. Therefore, Abram says,

"...I will not take a thread or a sandal thong or anything that is yours, lest you should say, 'I have made Abram rich.'" (Genesis 14:23 NASB)

"My confidence is in God Most High," says Abram. "I will count on him, rather than these human resources."

A thousand years later, David, who in one sense succeeded Melchizedek to the throne, pointed out that Melchizedek is like Messiah, in that he has been designated a king/priest forever by God. Now David knew that Melchizedek was not Messiah. He was not the angel of Jehovah. He was a historical figure; but he illustrates the kind of ministry that Messiah would have. He would meet our needs, whatever they were, in whatever situation we find ourselves. He would be a king/priest, with authority over our lives. He would mediate for us. He would stand on the Godward side of us, as Melchizedek did with Abram, and he would minister grace to us. He would supply right conduct, the power to be righteous, and he would supply peace -- the sense of inner adequacy. Thus our vision would be filled not with our own needs, and our own problems, and our own despair, but with the Lord Most High, who is the possessor of heaven and earth.

Hebrews 7 adds one further note, based on David's statement in Psalm 110:4 that Melchizedek would abide a priest forever. It appears that Melchizedek has no antecedents, there is no genealogy given for him. We don't know who his mother and father were, nor do we know who his descendants were. He just appears on the scene. Because this is so, it is as though he is eternal. He is like our high priest, Jesus, who is always available to us. He does not die; he is never inaccessible. He is always available.

Even Melchizedek is not a perfect example of a priest who is always available to us. Some years later. Abram made his way through that same valley on the way to Mount Moriah to sacrifice his son. For all he knew, he was going to have to offer his son, and this son was his last hope for his seed. Moriah is just a hundred yards or so above the city of Salem, and that particular time Melchizedek did not appear. There was no one there. There was only Abram and the Lord. So Melchizedek himself is not a perfect illustration of the priest who is to come.

The king/priest who is to come, the Lord Jesus, is always available. He is always adequate. He is there to meet our needs, he is there to give help in times of pressure and distress. It may be a head-on attack -- the sort of thing that Abram experienced from the kings of the east -- or it may be like the more subtle attack that came from the king of Sodom -- the unexpected attack, the temptation to count on our own resources instead of laying hold of the resources of the possessor of heaven and earth. But whatever the attack is, Jesus is a high priest who is always available. He is always there.

From reading the Bible, I have come to the conclusion that there are two kinds of people in the world: those who believe that heaven helps those who help themselves, and there are those who believe that God helps those who believe in the seed of the woman -- Jesus. The bread and wine that Melchizedek gave Abram is an illustration of the resources that come from God, just as the elements of the bread and juice that we partake of in communion are symbolic of the resources that we have in Christ. They are merely symbols -- but wherever we are, we can eat and drink of Christ. He is the high priest who remains, who ministers bread and wine to us wherever we are.

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AT JUDAS' FEET

by David H. Roper

As we look at this passage in John 13, it is important that we understand the situation the Lord faced as he did these things and uttered these words to his disciples in the Upper Room. This was his darkest hour. Less than twenty-four hours later, he went to the cross.

Inside, the disciples are meeting with the Lord, and outside there is confusion and hostility. The Passover plot is under way. The men who have been plotting Jesus' death for some time are now ready to act. Things are no better within the Upper Room. We know from reading the other Gospel accounts that the disciples were arguing and fighting among themselves, trying to determine who was the greatest among them and who would have honor in the kingdom, when the Lord came into his own. Of course, Judas himself was also in the Upper Room. This gives you some idea of the climate in which the following things took place.

It is interesting to see the Lord's actions through all of these events, and to note his poise, the quietness of his heart. Jesus has a resource, and it is very obvious that he does. There are times when he is troubled. John says of him -- and once he said of himself -- that he was troubled in his heart. This is the same term that Jesus uses later when he says to the disciples, "Don't let your hearts be troubled," (John 14:1). It is descriptive of an emotional state of agitation. As Jesus had to face honestly the climate that was against him, the disorder among his own disciples, and the hostility outside which would culminate in his death, he experienced times when he was in turmoil.

This was a very difficult time for the Lord, and he reacted as you would react. We have to remember that Jesus was fully human, as well as fully divine. He experienced all the emotions that we feel, and there were times when he was in emotional turmoil. But he kept reaching back to the Father, relying on him, and that is where he found the strength to act with poise and grace toward his disciples. With all this in the back of our minds, let's read Chapter 13, Verses 1 through 20:

Now before the Feast of the Passover, Jesus knowing that His hour had come that He should depart out of this world to the Father, having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end. And during supper, the devil having already put into the heart of Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon, to betray Him, Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He had come forth from God, and was going back to God, rose from supper, and laid aside His garments; and taking a towel, girded Himself about. Then he poured water into the basin, and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel with which He was girded. And so He came to Simon Peter. He said to Him, "Lord, do You wash my feet?" Jesus answered and said to him, "What I do you do not realize now; but you shall understand hereafter." Peter said to Him, "Never shall You wash my feet!" Jesus answered him, "If I do not wash you, you have no part with Me." Simon Peter said to Him, "Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head." Jesus said to him, "He who has bathed needs only to wash his feet, but is completely clean; and you are clean, but not all of you." For He knew the one who was betraying Him; for this reason He said, "Not all of you are clean."

And so when He had washed their feet, and taken His garments, and reclined at table again, He said to them, "Do you know what I have done to you? You call me Teacher, and Lord; and you are right; for so I am. If, I then, the Lord and the Teacher, washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I gave you an example that you also should do as I did to you. Truly, truly, I say to you, a slave is not greater than his master; neither one who is sent greater than the one who sent him. If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them. I do not speak of all of you. I know the ones I have chosen; but it is that the Scripture may be fulfilled, 'He who eats my bread has lifted up his heel against Me.' From now on I am telling you before it comes to pass, so that when it does occur, you may believe that I am He. Truly, truly, I say to you, he who receives whomever I send receives Me; and he who receives Me receives Him who sent Me." (John 13:1-20 NASB)

This passage neatly divides around two ideas: First, what Jesus knew, and second, what he did as a result of that knowledge. The first three verses tell us what he knew; the remaining verses tell us what actions grew out of that knowledge.

John tells us that, first of all, Jesus knew that his death was imminent, his hour had come. "His hour" was the hour of his death. Secondly, he knew that the traitor was in their midst. The other Gospels record that Jesus said "the hand of the betrayer is on the table with us" (Luke 22:21). Judas was there in their midst. Thirdly, we are told that he knew where he was going, he knew where he had come from, and he had authority to sustain him along the way. His origin was in God. He had come from God, he was going back to God, and it was God's power that sustained him en route. Those were the things that made it possible for him to act the way he acted. He knew clearly who he was, because he saw himself in relationship to his Father, and he knew he was okay. He knew that he had what he needed to face these circumstances.

Now, you would think that Jesus' disciples would be concerned about him and minister to him during this time. But they ignore him. They are so interested in their own problems and preoccupied with their own thinking that they completely

miss the fact that he is hurting and in trouble. But because the Lord knows who he is -- in terms of his relationship to God -- he is able to minister to the disciples, instead of them ministering to him.

Now, what is true of our Lord is true of us in our identification with him. Paul says, "We are made complete in him," (Colossians 1:28, 2:10). We have exactly the same relationship with the Father that he had. We are sons of God, and heirs with Christ. Thus we have a divine origin as well. John talks about our life that comes from God. When you place your faith in Jesus Christ, you receive God's life, divine life. And so your origin is Jesus' origin, and your destiny is to be with God. Nothing can change that -- not the decision you have to make tomorrow, not your actions today -- nothing can change your destiny if you belong to God. That is a great thing to know. The contract you are going to sign tomorrow is not going to change your destiny. The call that you make in the huddle tomorrow is not going to affect your destiny. You are secure in your relationship to God.

It is God's authority that sustains you en route; therefore, you, like the Lord, can face any circumstance with poise and with calmness of heart. You do not need to be ministered to; you can minister. That is what makes God's family so unique. Even when we are hurting -- and I am sure many of you are troubled about many things -- we can minister to others because we know the Father as our Lord knew the Father. Even if you are hurting, you can care about someone else's hurt.

Now, so that you will understand the cultural setting of this passage, you should know that it was the practice in those days to bathe on the way to some special occasion. There were large, public Roman baths, and normally that was where the people would prepare themselves for some special occasion. Few people had bathtubs in their homes, so they would go to the Roman baths and bring clean clothes to put on after their baths. Then they would go on to the special occasion, such as this gathering in the Upper Room. But, since they wore sandals, as they would make their way through the streets, their feet would be defiled, they would get dirty. So, in preparation for the meal, normally the household servant would wash their feet -- and thus they would be clean all over. That is the cultural setting for this incident in the Upper Room.

There are two things I want you to see in this section: First, the parable that the Lord gives us of his own ministry, and, second, the pattern that he provides for our ministry. I think that John, in describing the Lord's actions, is giving us a parable -- a sort of visual aid to explain Jesus' ministry on earth.

The passage says that Jesus "rose from supper, and laid aside His garments..." You will note that the word "garments" is plural. In those days men wore three layers of clothing. They wore an outer cape, a sort of long robe that would reach to the ankles; under that they wore a knee-length tunic; and then as an undergarment, they wore a sort of breechcloth. You can gather from this passage that when Jesus began to wash their feet he took off both of his outer garments. He took off his outer robe, the long, flowing robe that he wore, and also the short tunic. So he was dressed in his undergarment -- a breechcloth, the sort of apparel that a slave would wear -- as he washed the disciples' feet.

Then Jesus proceeds with the actual foot-washing. We can gather from this passage that he washes the feet of all of the disciples, including Judas. Then he puts his garments back on and sits down. In describing these actions, John is picturing for us the Lord's ministry. Jesus was at the right hand of the Father, he shared all the rights and privileges of the Father. And yet, Paul tells us, he stripped himself of the independent use of his glory. He took off his garments, so to speak, and became a man. As a man, he served, and the extent of his service was death. He was obedient even to the point of death. He poured out his life for us. Then, having done that, Paul says, Jesus was "highly exalted" and was given "the name that is above every name," (Philippians 2:9 NASB). That is, he put on his robes again and sat down at the right hand of the Father.

This is instructive to me and tells me what the Lord came to do. He came to be a servant. He came to do the things that no one else wanted to do. He came to clean up the messes that everyone else made, because, basically, that is what a servant does.

I have lost track of the number of times I have looked in our front bathroom and seen towels strewn all over the place. I find the first boy who has wet hair, and I say, "Hey, you left the bathroom in a mess." Invariably, he says, "I didn't do it; my brother did." I say, "That's all right -- you clean it up anyway."

That is what servanthood is -- cleaning up other peoples' messes. That is what the Lord came to do. He spent his life cleaning up the messes that we make, putting things back together. He was a servant; he poured himself out even to the point of death.

The thing that is instructive to me is that Jesus poured himself out as a servant even for Judas. All the way through Jesus' association with Judas he was reaching out to him. He knew from the very beginning who it was who would betray him. Many times, through allusions, he would try to draw Judas toward him. His comment in the Upper Room that he was aware of what was going on was one of these attempts. Toward the end of his life, as he approaches the cross and sees Judas moving irrevocably toward betraying him, Jesus reaches out for Judas. Then, in this incident in the Upper Room, he washes the feet of Judas, the betrayer.

Evidently, all through their association, Jesus never gave any hint to any of the disciples that he knew it would be Judas who would betray him. The disciples were not aware of who the betrayer was when Jesus said that one of them would betray him. No one knew. The Lord loved Judas. There was never a hint of resentment, never even one note of bitterness. He just loved him and kept reaching out to him.

Even in the final incident, when Jesus dips the morsel into the little pot of meat and hands it to Judas, having prefaced the act by the words "He who has eaten My bread has lifted up his heel against Me," he is saying to Judas, "Do you understand what you are doing? Do you grasp the enormity of this act?"

The passage which Jesus quotes here, "He who eats My bread has lifted up his heel against Me," is from a psalm that David wrote when he went into exile. He had been betrayed by his own son, and that was the expression of his heart: "The one who has eaten bread with me, who sat at my table, has betrayed me!" (Psalms 41:9 NASB). Then, in this symbolic way, Jesus gives Judas a piece of bread to show him again that the one who had eaten bread at his table was going to betray him. The Lord was reaching out to Judas a final time. It was never too late for Judas, but at this point his mind was made up. So he went out to betray the Lord. You don't see any hint of the Lord rejecting Judas -- not one hint. He loved him and served him as one of his own. I see a parable in these actions of our Lord, and the parable tells us the nature of Christ's ministry.

The second thing that I see is that this is a pattern for our ministry, because the Lord said, "What I did, you are to do." He said this first to the disciples, and, by extension, to all who follow him. We are to trace the same pattern. We are to be the same sort of servants. Now, it is apparent that when Jesus said that we are to do what he did he is not talking about washing feet. There is certainly nothing wrong with washing feet -- probably some of us could stand both to receive and to give this service -- but that is not what Jesus was talking about. In the first place, Jesus said to the disciples, "You don't understand what I am doing, but you will understand later." If he was merely talking about washing feet, they would understand. There is nothing particularly difficult to understand about washing feet. You learn that technique in a matter of minutes. Jesus has something else in mind.

Secondly, Jesus begins to talk first to Peter and then to the rest of the disciples about the nature of the salvation that he came to bring, and he identifies that with the act of washing feet. He comes to Peter and begins to wash his feet, and Peter says, "No, no; you will never wash my feet!" And Jesus says, "If I do not wash your feet, you have no part with me." Jesus certainly did not mean by that statement that he was offended by Peter's dirty feet and wouldn't associate with him as long as his feet were dirty. Anyone who would embrace dirty little urchins on the streets of Jerusalem and love them certainly wouldn't be offended by dirty feet. There is something else wrong.

Peter's dirty feet symbolized a deeper spiritual condition which could affect his relationship with the Lord in some way. So Jesus says to Peter, "Unless I wash your feet, you can't have any part with me." Peter, predictably, responds, "Then, Lord, give me a bath all over! Wash my head, my hands, everything!" Jesus says, "No, you are already clean; you need only to have your feet washed." What Jesus meant by "clean" or "bathed all over" was that the disciples, because of their relationship to Jesus, had been cleansed of their sin, they had been justified. They had been declared righteous because they aligned themselves with God's program to bring salvation to the world. They had identified themselves with Jesus, they had entrusted themselves to him, and they were clean -- except for Judas.

But just as walking through the streets gets your feet dirty, walking through the world causes an accumulation of moral dirt. We get our feet defiled. We begin to pick up the attitudes of the world -- sometimes without being aware of it. And that is what had happened to the disciples. They were beginning to reflect the attitude of the world outside. Outside, there was hostility; people were bent on destroying Jesus. Inside, essentially, there was no difference. These men were still thinking of themselves. They weren't concerned about the Lord's needs; they were preoccupied with their own. Jesus is saying, "You have picked up the attitude of the world -- you have defiled your feet." And so he washes their feet.

The remedy for defiled feet, Jesus says, is washing. Now, you can wash them yourself. That is clear from Verse 10, where Jesus says, "He who has bathed needs only to wash his feet." He doesn't say "have his feet washed." See the

difference? It is possible for you to wash your own feet if they are defiled. Or, if for some reason you won't or can't wash your own feet, someone else can wash them for you. Someone can come to you in a spirit of love and tenderness and concern and point you to the Word and to repentance, and call you back to the Lord.

Jesus said this is a ministry that all of us should engage in -- either washing our own feet when they become defiled, or washing one another's feet. He says in Verse 20, "He who receives whomever I send receives Me; and he who receives Me receives Him who sent Me." That is, "I am sending you out as my emissary to wash feet. And when people receive you, when they allow you to wash their feet, it is as though I myself am washing their feet." Now, that gives significance to foot-washing. That puts dignity into servanthood. When you go out to clean up other people's messes, you go to serve their needs and minister to people who are hurting, who are failing, who are engulfed by sin, who are defiled by the actions of others around them. If you go out to minister to them, it is as though the Lord himself were washing their feet and ministering to their needs.

When we gather around the Lord's table, it is just as though we were put back into the same situation that the disciples experienced. The Lord is there washing our feet today. It is only on the basis of our relationship to him that we can ever be cleansed all over, or can wash away the defilement that our feet have picked up this last week. As you minister to your own spiritual needs, and to the needs of the people around you, and reach out to your friends that are in trouble and serve them, it is the Lord himself who is serving through you. That lends dignity and significance to your ministry.

Perhaps your feet are defiled today and you know it. You sense that your relationship with God has grown cold, you don't love the Lord -- you have grown indifferent. It is because something in your life is defiling you. You know you have been cleansed, you know that God has forgiven you of all your sins; and yet you know there is some area of your life where you are resisting the lordship of Christ, and this is affecting your relationship to the Lord. His relationship to you is always secure -- he is always there -- but this sin has affected the way you feel about him. Perhaps it is a relationship that you have been hanging onto that you know is wrong, or ought to be changed. Perhaps it is some shoddy business practice you have been involved with, or some attitude toward your children, or your parents, your husband, or your wife.

Whatever it is, this is an appropriate time to wash your own feet -- or to let the Lord wash your feet. That is really what is involved with this action. It is the Lord cleansing us from sin. Or perhaps this scripture has shown you that you need to go to someone you love and minister to his or her needs. That is what we are here to do today.

Therefore encourage one another, and build up one another, just as you also are doing.

But we request of you, brethren, that you appreciate those who diligently labor among you, and have charge over you in the Lord and give you instruction, and that you esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Live in peace with one another. And we urge you, brethren, admonish the unruly, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with all men. See that no one repays another with evil for evil, but always seek after that which is good for one another and for all men. Rejoice always; pray without ceasing; in everything give thanks; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. Do not quench the Spirit; do not despise prophetic utterances. But examine everything carefully; hold fast to that which is good; abstain from every form of evil.

Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete, without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. (1 Thessalonians 5:11-23 (NASB))

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THE SERVANT OF THE LORD

by David H. Roper

In preparation for communion, I would like to lead you in a brief study in the servant song in Isaiah 42. The book of Isaiah is divided into three parts:

The first section, Chapters 1-35, deals with Isaiah's times. He is speaking to his contemporaries. This section is set against the backdrop of the Assyrian period. Although Judah is powerful, wealthy, and influential, it is spiritually decadent. Isaiah speaks to these times and talks about the injustice of that period. Though God looks for righteousness and justice, what he sees is the cry of the oppressed, and Isaiah predicts that judgment is coming. "He will whistle [to use Isaiah's term] for Assyria." The Assyrians will be the rod that God uses to chasten his people. In those opening chapters Isaiah speaks very explicitly about the problems that exist in the nation and about the judgment that is coming.

The second section of Isaiah, Chapters 36-39, is a historical bridge between the first and third sections and introduces at least one of the causes of the Babylonian captivity. In the third section, Chapters 40-66, Isaiah speaks about the Babylonian captivity, which is to take place at least 130 years after his time. He predicts its coming, tells them what it will be like, predicts the regathering to the land, the rebuilding of the temple, and the restoration of the nation in Judah.

If the theme of the first 35 chapters is condemnation, the theme of these final chapters is comfort. Isaiah prepares God's people for the exile well in advance, and he comforts them in advance. It is so much like the Lord to prepare us for times of trial and to announce comfort even before we enter into these periods. This is what he does through Isaiah.

In the closing chapters, 40-66, Isaiah talks about one who is designated as the Servant of the Lord, the Servant who will effect salvation, the one through whom God will accomplish his purposes in the nation. This one is very much the center of Isaiah's thinking, particularly in the section from Chapters 40 through 53. This song in the first four verses of Chapter 42 is the first of these references to the Servant of the Lord.

Just to give you a brief introduction to Chapter 42, I would like you to notice that Chapter 41 is a court scene. God calls all the Gentile nations to stand before the bar of judgment. God is the judge and prosecuting attorney and the jury. He asks these nations to present their case. He brings together two classes of Gentiles. There are the Gentiles off to the East (from Mesopotamia), and the Gentiles from the West (around the Mediterranean coast). The issue in this court scene is: Who can bring about justice in the world? Who can effect justice? Who can set things right? God calls on the nations to present their case, and then he presents his case. He describes his mighty acts in history, and how he is going to effect salvation, and then he asks the nations, "How will you set things right?"

You have to remember that when Isaiah was writing there were a number of large empires that were either in the process of being built or were already established -- the Assyrian and Babylonian empires were both established during this time. The city of Rome was founded shortly after Isaiah's time. This was the classical period of Greece, the Golden Age. So the nations are called upon to give an answer, a solution to the problems that face mankind. How can we heal a broken, suffering, struggling humanity? And they have nothing to say. These are the great thinkers of their age, the people upon whom most of our western thought is based, and they have no answer. In Verses 28 and 29 of Chapter 41, God gives his verdict:

**"But when I look [at the nations], there is no one,
And there is no counselor among them**

[There is no one who can give good counsel, who can lead mankind out of his circumstances]

Who, if I ask, can give an answer.

Behold, all of them are false;

Their works are worthless,

Their molten images are wind and emptiness." (Isaiah 41:28-29 NASB)

They have nothing to say. But then another figure is introduced into the courtroom, and he is the Servant of the Lord. First God calls on us in Verse 29 to behold the nations -- representatives from the East and from the West -- then, in Chapter 42, Verse 1, he calls on us to behold the Servant. He fixes our attention on the one he has designated here as his Servant. Of course, this is always the answer to man's problems -- fixing our eyes on the Servant of the Lord, getting our eyes off the thoughts and philosophies that are alternatives to the solution the Servant poses.

The question, of course, is, "Who is the Servant?" It seems very clear that in this particular passage the Servant is the Lord Jesus. The Jews recognized, long before Jesus' time, that this was a reference to Messiah. In almost all of their ancient translations from the Hebrew and Aramaic, they insert between the third and fourth words of Verse 1 the word *Messiah*: "Behold, My Servant, Messiah..." So, before Jesus came, the Jews knew to whom this verse referred. Matthew, speaking as an inspired apostle, applies these words directly to the Lord. For those of us who believe the Scriptures, there is no question. The Servant of the Lord here is the Lord Jesus. We are called upon to look at him as the solution to every problem. Now let's see how the Servant is described:

**"Behold, My Servant, whom I uphold;
 My chosen one in whom My soul delights.
 I have put My Spirit upon Him;
 He will bring forth justice to the nations.
 He will not cry out or raise his voice,
 Nor make His voice heard in the street.
 A bruised reed He will not break,
 And a dimly burning wick He will not extinguish;
 He will faithfully bring forth justice.
 He will not be disheartened or crushed,
 Until He has established justice in the earth;
 And the coastlands will wait expectantly for His law." (Isaiah 42:1-4 NASB)**

You will recognize immediately that the theme of this section is justice. In twelve lines he says three times that this one, the Servant of the Lord, will bring forth justice. In other words, this is the one who will set things right, because that is what the term "justice" means. He will establish things as they ought to be.

There are two terms that occur frequently in the Old Testament, and they are often found in conjunction with one another -- the terms "righteousness" and "justice."

The word "righteousness" in the Old Testament means to bring a thing into conformity with a standard or a norm. In other words, they would refer to weights that were accurate as "righteous weights." They would conform to a norm, to a standard. In the Old Testament evergreen trees are described as "trees of righteousness" because they always look as a tree ought to look. They do not drop their leaves during the winter, so they are "righteous" trees. The term basically means to bring a thing into conformity with what it ought to be, to establish it according to the right standard. In the Old Testament the standard is the character of God, so "righteousness" means bringing something into conformity with the character of God.

Justice is the outworking of righteousness. Justice is the application of righteousness. It is the action by which the king or some other person brings about a state of righteousness in the nation. Justice is the practical application of righteousness. So when Isaiah says "The Servant of the Lord will bring about justice in the world," he is saying that he will establish things according to a right standard -- things will be as they ought to be. Whether we are talking about our homes, or society, or ourselves, it is the Servant of the Lord who is the only one who can get things aligned with God's standard. No one else can. There is no alternative to the Servant of the Lord.

In this section we are told something of the resources that empowered the Servant, then we are told something of his manner, or his demeanor, and finally, we are given a word about his persistence: First, let's look at the resources that enable God's Servant to bring about justice in the earth. He is described as the Servant whom the Father upholds. The term "uphold" means to take hold of something. It means to strengthen someone by taking a grip on them. That is what the Father does to the Servant, the Lord Jesus. The Lord Jesus derives his strength from the Father.

We normally think of the Lord, since he is God, as sufficient in himself. But the Lord himself tells us that his strength was derived from the Father. He was not strong in himself. He experienced all of the weaknesses and limitations of the flesh, apart from sin; therefore he understands our limitations. He himself had to depend on the Father for his strength. There was simply no other way that he could carry out the ministry that the Father had given to him.

In contrast to that, when the representatives of both the Eastern and Western worlds are under stress, they say, "Let's strengthen one another." In Chapter 41, Verse 5, we read,

The coastlands
 [referring to the western Gentile powers, those around the Mediterranean Sea -- Romans, Greeks, Egyptians]
**have seen and are afraid;
 The ends of the earth tremble;
 They have drawn near and have come.
 Each one helps his neighbor,
 And says to his brother, "Be strong!" (Isaiah 41:5-6 NASB)**

This uses the same term that is found in Chapter 42 where it says the Lord upholds, or strengthens, takes hold of, his Servant. All of Eastern and Western philosophy is shot through with the idea that the way to handle crises (in this case it was the invasion of Cyrus from the East) is to say to one another, "Be strong!"

Haven't you heard that before? "Try again. Try harder! Take a grip on yourself. When the going gets tough, the tough get going!" That is the way we encourage one another. If you have a hard day tomorrow, just be strong -- instead of being strengthened by the Lord!

I saw a Peanuts strip last week in which Charlie Brown goes to Lucy for counseling. She is sitting in her booth under her banner, "Psychiatry -- 5 cents." Charlie Brown says, "Lucy, you know how I've tried -- tell me I've tried! I've tried and I've tried and I've tried to be good!" Lucy says, "Nice try, Charlie Brown. Five cents."

Second, we are told that the Servant is the Father's chosen one, who delights the Father. "My chosen one in whom My soul delights." I have three sons, and they all are a great delight to me, so I can understand this. The Servant was a Son whom the Father loved and had especially chosen. These are the words that were addressed to the Son at his baptism: "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased," (Matthew 3:17 NASB). Long before the Lord Jesus ever did a thing, before he worked a miracle, before he ever taught, before he engaged in any ministry at all, he was assured of the love, approval, and delight of the Father. That is what enabled him to endure the rejection of men. People were not delighted with him, but he could persevere in what he was doing because he was assured of the acceptance and love of the Father. Of course, the same is true of us. We are not always going to receive the praise and appreciation of people. They won't always understand. We won't delight them. But we, like the Son, are chosen, and we are a source of delight to the Father.

Third, we are told that the Servant is empowered because he possesses the Spirit: "I have put my Spirit upon him." In the Old Testament, the Spirit is the principle that gets things done. It is the animating principle; it is God at work. It is God. More than a principle, it is a Person. The Spirit is described in the Old Testament in terms that the people could understand. The same term that is translated *wind* or *breath* throughout the Old Testament is also translated *Spirit*. People had seen the wind at work, although they couldn't see the wind. This is the way the ministry of the Son is described. He possessed the Spirit and the Spirit empowered him. Everywhere he went the wind blew. He could affect people's lives powerfully and change attitudes and have a great impact upon people because he possessed the Spirit.

These are the characteristics of the Son -- he is upheld by God, chosen by God, and he possesses the Spirit. This was the power he drew upon to carry out his ministry. The last line of Verse 1 tells us that because of the resources that he possesses in the Father "He will bring forth justice to the nations." He will set things right.

The second verse tells us something of the Servant's manner: "He will not cry out or raise His voice, nor make His voice heard in the street." He didn't demand recognition. He didn't publish daily reports in the Jerusalem Post. He didn't talk about what he did, nor did he necessarily tell people how he did it. He went about doing what the Father had called him to do. He didn't promote himself, but he quietly followed the will of his Father. Then we are told in Verse 3,

**A bruised reed He will not break,
And a dimly burning wick He will not extinguish. (Isaiah 42:3a NASB)**

This is a description of the nature of his ministry and the sort of people he was drawn to, the kind of lives that were most attractive to him. Somehow we have fallen into the mistake of thinking that God is only pleased with the strong, with those who have everything thought through spiritually, who handle all their problems and who do not struggle, or those who are in positions of leadership, who appear to have everything together. We think those are the people God is pleased with. We think God is sort of put off by the rest of us because we are struggling. This passage puts the lie to that thought. It is the broken and the bruised and the nearly extinguished that God ministers to.

This is a very graphic picture. I can see in my mind a slender reed, crushed, half-broken, bending over, or a little lamp with a piece of flax in it, nearly extinguished, merely a glowing ember. The Lord props up the broken reed, and he fans into flame the smoking flax. That is what he was called to do. He came, he said, "as a physician to the sick," (Mark 2:17 NASB). Those were the people he was drawn to, the ones he ministered to.

We are fortunate here in our family to have a very fine heart surgeon, Ed Stinson. One thing I have noticed about Ed is that he never asks me about the state of my heart. Last time we talked he asked me how my beard was growing, but he didn't say a thing about my heart. He is not preoccupied with my heart; he doesn't call me up every day to ask if it is still plugging along. But when he meets somebody with a troubled heart, that is when he goes into action. All of his compassion and the skill of his mind and hands is brought to bear on healing that troubled heart. That is what attracts him.

If the truth is to be known, all of us have troubled hearts. All of us are broken reeds, despite the front that we erect. We are smoking flax. And that is what draws the Lord to our aid. He wants to minister to us, to fan us back into flame, prop us up, strengthen and encourage us. And that is the ministry that we are called to, as well. We are to seek out the weak and the floundering and the struggling and to minister to them. And, by so doing, Isaiah tells us again, he will faithfully bring forth justice.

Then, in Verse 4, we learn of the Servant's persistence:

**"He will not be disheartened or crushed,
Until He has established justice in the earth;
And the coastlands will wait expectantly for His law." (Isaiah 42:4 NASB)**

The term translated "disheartened" is the same word that is found in the second line of Verse 3, "a dimly burning wick." The term translated "crushed" is the same word that is translated "bruised" in the first line of Verse 3. The point is that, though the Servant ministers to the bruised and crushed, he himself is never bruised or crushed. He doesn't catch the disease. He doesn't give up; he doesn't get fainthearted. He doesn't say to me and to you, "One more time and I'm not available; one more time and I won't forgive."

How many times have we said, "Here I am, Lord, back again, doing the same thing. Can you ever forgive me?" Certainly he can. He never gives up. He will persist until he will bring about justice.

That is the ministry that was given to the Servant. He was one submissive to the will of the Father. He is the one who ministers to us and to our needs. He had from the Father all the resources necessary to bring about justice and to set things right, and he set about doing it. Quietly, without fanfare, without drawing a large following -- certainly not at the end of his ministry -- he quietly and patiently ministered to the weak and lowly, to the oppressed, to the downtrodden. And though it appeared throughout his lifetime that his efforts were fruitless, he established justice. He laid down the basis for a righteous and just society.

That, of course, is the pattern for our lives, as well. He not only accomplished what he set out to do, he gave us the example. And he is the one who has called us to the same ministry.

I just want to encourage you with those words. I think Paul had them in mind when he wrote in Second Timothy,

And the Lord's bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged, with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition. (2 Timothy 2:24-25a NASB)

That was the Lord's ministry, and that is our ministry as well. So if you are here this morning and you feel like a bruised and broken reed and your flax is about to go out, remember, it is the Servant of the Lord that you need to behold.

Prayer

Father, it is good to know that you love us, and we thank you, Father, that you who are perfect sent a perfect give, the perfect Servant, into the world. None of us, even though we were created by you, is adequate. None of us could serve you as you are to be served, except through your Son, Christ. So we praise you and thank you that he who is with you in the beginning is alive and well and reigns. Amen.

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